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McCarthy's Bid

Senator Eugene McCarthy has given gusto to the hopeful talk by Vietnam war critics of "President dumping." The Minnesota senator has told colleagues he will enter four Democratic primaries. His candidacy could coalesce the vigorous and volatile opposition to President Johnson's war policies within his own party.

The McCarthy challenge would hit the President right where it hurts — in his intra-party consensus, in the popularity polls and in the 1968 ballot boxes.

The Minnesotan is an intelligent, articulate vote-getter. His background as a high school and college teacher gives him a rapport with the growing number of young voters. Four terms in the U.S. House and 10 years in the Senate have given him a depth of governmental experience. Through membership on the important Senate Finance and Foreign Relations committees, he has gained an informed, mature judgment on such issues as taxation, trade and foreign affairs.

He offers a view of U.S. foreign relations sharply different from that of the President. "Our foreign policy should be more restrained and, insofar as prudent judgment can determine, more closely in keeping with the movement of history," McCarthy wrote in his recent book, "The Limits of Power."

He would rely more on the United Nations and other multi-national agencies, less on the "dirty tricks" of the Central Intelligence Agency. He wants sharp restrictions and controls on the sale of arms. Greater reliance should be placed on the Foreign Relations Committee in the formulation and conduct of foreign policies.

The reasons given by the Johnson Administration for U.S. policies in Vietnam are criticized by McCarthy. "In the early phase of this war, no one ever accepted that our defense perimeter extended as far as Vietnam," he writes. The "China-containment men" of a few years back didn't argue that this required the commitment of a half million troops to Vietnam. South Vietnam never has requested action under the SEATO treaty. If it did, joint action would be impossible because of the positions of other signers — France, Pakistan and possibly Britain.

Communist China is not seen by McCarthy as a great danger to international security. With a population estimated at between 750 and 895 million, growing at a rate of 2 per cent a year, China will be concerned primarily with internal development, not military expansion, he thinks. McCarthy cites a study of China's potential progress which assumes a high average annual economic growth of 5½ to 7½ per cent, a 2 per cent birth rate and concludes that by 1985 China will have reached the level of per capita income attained in Russia in the 1930s.

With Chairman Mao 73 and the average age of the Politburo nearly 70, McCarthy foresees a period of continuing instability similar to those which convulsed the Soviet Union at the deaths of Lenin and Stalin.

The Minnesota senator thus challenges many of the basic premises of the Johnson Administration. If he enters the hustings, he can be expected to state his positions forthrightly and well. Many Democrats undoubtedly would be swayed by McCarthy's arguments.

Despite the hopes of the opponents of the war, we see little likelihood of the Democratic Convention "dumping" the incumbent President. McCarthy's candidacy, however, should bring pressure on the President to work even harder and more sincerely for a peaceful settlement of the war. Win or lose, McCarthy would force a confrontation of the war issue within the Democratic Party. Through such political pressures and confrontations, a democracy makes decisions.